

VERMONT

Workforce Development Council

Executive Committee

Notes

12/14/09

Overview of H.405 and preliminary recommendations - Karrin Wilkes provided an overview of the soon to be released report that has been prepared as specified by the Legislature in Act 38. A copy of the report was subsequently provided and is attached. The committee responded to Karrin's presentation, supporting the findings and noting that while 100% graduation from college is desirable, other postsecondary alternatives beyond higher education, such as apprenticeships or professional certifications should also be considered.

Update on the Education/Economic Development meeting with State Leaders and Legislators – John explained that the meeting was held on December 1. The attendance was good with Chairs of House and Senate Education and representatives of Senate Economic Development and House Commerce as well as Secy. Dorn, Commissioners Powden and Vilasecca and Allan Rodgers representing the VSC. Speaker Smith attended for lunch. John explained that the conversation quickly moved to a discussion of governance and the potential for employing two complimentary strategies. First to consolidate districts and second to use some of the resources freed up to fund innovations. he reported that savings from increasing student/teacher ratios could also produce substantial savings. John explained that Armando offered to send a copy of the Department's Opportunity to Learn report to John and Chip for comment. This report will address some of the issues raised by the group. The committee agreed that the WDC should articulate the importance of strong employer partnerships and work-based-learning as part of future program development. The WDC should be prepared to step up in this area.

Report on GBIC findings regarding the workforce from their recent employer breakfasts – Frank Cioffi explained that GBIC had held two focus groups where businesses could speak up/ Forty companies participated on a range of topics including workforce issues such as the difficulty in finding qualified workers, the interest in internships, increasing funding for the Vermont Training Program. A copy of the report was distributed.

Winter Meeting – Chip stated that it was going to be difficult to hold the winter meeting in January due to the ARRA workload making preparations difficult. It was agreed to look for a date in mid to late February to allow time for planning.

WIB Update – Chip reported on the likelihood of a merger between the Bradford and Upper Valley WIBs. The committee endorsed this idea and encouraged Chip to pursue it.

ACT 38 (H.405) WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS TO SENATE AND HOUSE COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION January 5, 2010

INTRODUCTION

Act 38 (H.405) established a working group to develop strategies to expand educational opportunities for Vermont students to succeed in elementary and secondary school, and to be prepared to succeed in postsecondary education.

The working group was comprised of representatives from the Vermont State Colleges, the University of Vermont, the Association of Vermont Independent Colleges, the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation, and the Department of Education, and chaired by the Vermont State Colleges. The group met three times, and also consulted with the Vermont Business Roundtable, the executive committee of the Vermont Workforce Development Council, and members of the State Board of Education's Policy Transformation Commission. In addition, the working group researched policies and practices in other states aimed at increasing educational attainment across the PK-16 spectrum.

The findings of the working group confirmed the purpose statement in the legislation:

- *Vermont should make available as many opportunities as possible for Vermont students to succeed in their Pre-K-12 education, to encourage and facilitate high school students to progress toward higher education, and to prepare postsecondary students to succeed.*
- *Completing high school cannot be considered the minimum educational attainment.*

As stated by President Obama in his address before Congress on February 24, 2009, every American should "commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be community college or a four-year school; vocational training or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma...

That is why we will provide the support necessary to ... meet a new goal: By 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world."

- *For Vermont to thrive economically it must develop, attract, and retain a well-educated and highly skilled citizenry, who will in turn enable the development, recruitment, and retention of successful businesses and support healthy communities.*
- *Higher levels of educational attainment translate into higher earnings and tax revenues, increased civic engagement and community contributions, better overall health, decreased dependency on government services, and an improved quality of life.*
- *To increase educational attainment among Vermonters, educational partnerships between higher education and the Pre-K-12 educational system are crucial to increasing postsecondary aspirations, increasing the enrollment of Vermont high school graduates in higher education programs, increasing the postsecondary degree completion rates of Vermont students, and increasing public awareness of the economic, intellectual, and societal benefits of higher education.*

It is noteworthy that a number of other groups have come to the same conclusions in recent months. The Vermont Board of Education's Transformation Policy Commission, the Vermont Commission on Higher Education Funding and the Vermont Business Roundtable are among the members of both the business and education communities who recognize that every Vermont high school graduate should be prepared to succeed in college, and that Vermont must make every effort to raise postsecondary educational attainment for all our citizens.

The following recommendations have been endorsed by the Act 38 (H.405) working group:

ENACT A PUBLIC POLICY STATEMENT ENDORSING EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Title 16 should include a strong public policy statement about the importance of educational attainment. It should emphasize the goal of Vermonters acquiring postsecondary credentials in order to develop and maintain the most highly educated, most competitive, most highly engaged citizenry possible. Few things are more important to the economic, social and intellectual well-being of Vermonters and Vermont than educational attainment.

For half a century, America has viewed completing high school as the minimum education accomplishment, but the requirements for equal opportunity, economic competitiveness and an engaged citizenry have changed. In the 21st century, earning at least an associate's degree is as important as earning a high school diploma was twenty years ago, and the benefits from earning a baccalaureate degree are even greater. More than two-thirds of Vermont's fastest-growing occupations require postsecondary education, certification or training.

Many other states have made "college for all" an explicit public policy direction, including Kentucky, Maine, North Carolina and Texas. Because of the clear individual and social benefits of postsecondary credentials, we must assume that everyone aims for college unless there's a good reason not to. Although not fully implemented due to lack of funding, the Maine Compact for Higher Education went so far as to assert: "Completing a college degree is a fundamental right and *responsibility* of all Maine people" (emphasis added). This requires a shift in thinking from "not everyone needs to go to college" to creating shared postsecondary aspirations for all students, particularly those unlikely to aspire to college themselves. The message becomes, for all Vermont students, "We believe you can go to college, and we will prepare you to succeed should you choose to go." This belief that all Vermont students must be prepared for success in college, careers and citizenry is at the heart of "Opportunity to Learn: Defining Vermont Education for a New Generation of Learners," the final report of the Education Transformation Policy Commission released in December 2009.

ESTABLISH A STATE-LEVEL PK-16 PARTNERSHIP

Establish a state-level PK-16 Partnership, modeled on successful partnerships in other states, with the responsibility of developing a PK-16 Master plan. Consider replacing the Commission on Higher Education with this Partnership.

Membership should include executive-level representation from the Vermont State Colleges, the University of Vermont, AVIC (Association of Vermont Independent Colleges), the Department of Education, the Department of Labor and VSAC; representatives from the field on behalf of superintendents, principals, teachers and school boards; leaders from business and industry, and the chairs of the House and Senate Education Committees. The partnership must have strong gubernatorial support.

VERMONT PK-16 MASTER PLAN ELEMENTS: ESTABLISH CLEAR GOALS

Vermont's PK-16 Partnership should be charged with developing a statewide master plan for PK-16 education outcomes, with specific and ambitious state-level goals. Targets that have been promoted in other venues, including by the Vermont Legislature, by the Vermont State Board of Education, and in the U.S. Congress include:

- all Vermont children enter kindergarten ready to learn by 2020;
- K-12 performance gaps between socio-economic groups are eliminated by 2020;
- all high school graduates complete at least one college course or other postsecondary education/ training experience while still in high school;
- Vermont's high school graduation rate increases to 100% by 2020;
- Vermont's postsecondary aspiration rate increases to 90% by 2020;
- Vermont's postsecondary continuation rate increases to 85% by 2020;
- Vermont reaches the goal of 60% of the population having at least an associate's degree by 2025 (which will require decreasing the need for remediation upon entry into college and increasing postsecondary retention and completion rates by targets appropriate to specific institutions);
- Vermont increases the annual number of college graduates in STEM fields to 1500 by 2020.

Such targets reflect the importance of creating a seamless PK-16 education system framed by rigorous standards and high expectations for all students. Vermont's PK-16 Partnership should develop specific strategies—*beginning with those listed below*— for reaching stated goals, including an ongoing process to monitor progress. (See Kentucky's "Double the Numbers.")

STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS OF THE PK-16 MASTER PLAN

1. IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

In order to raise educational attainment levels overall and meet ambitious state-level targets, the Partnership must work to improve educational quality statewide, including specific strategies related to school quality standards, teacher preparation, leadership development, ongoing professional development, and family/ community relations.

The Partnership should review the work of the State Board of Education's Transformation Policy Commission as a means of focusing efforts in this area.

Additionally, the Partnership should build on the work of the recent Effective Schools Study completed by the Vermont Department of Education, which analyzed how three elementary schools in Vermont have successfully reduced performance gaps between low-income students and their wealthier counterparts. Efforts should further build on the work of the many local and regional PK-16 partnerships that exist

throughout Vermont. Other effective models outside Vermont, such as the Harlem Children's Zone, should be considered.

The Partnership should develop strategies to replicate the results of successful PK-12 schools. The question is: what would it look like and how much would it cost if Vermont were to raise the performance bar across the PK-16 continuum for all low-income students? In Vermont as across the nation, low-income students are less likely than higher income students to enter kindergarten ready to learn, to graduate from high school, and to continue on to and succeed in college. More specifically, low-income students enter kindergarten with a substantially smaller vocabulary than their wealthier counterparts. Low-income students are likely to suffer larger learning losses over the summer and other breaks, starting behind and getting further behind. Low-income students are less likely to aspire to college and often determine that they will not go to college as early as the sixth grade. Teacher effectiveness is often cited as the single largest determinant of a child's future academic performance. The place to start is to understand what already works, what needs to change in the PK-16 continuum, and to determine the implications for teacher preparation, ongoing professional development, school leadership and community partnerships.

2. PROMOTE EARLY OUTREACH AND CAREER AWARENESS

Expanding early career awareness and increasing postsecondary aspirations are vital to the goal of increasing educational attainment and, thus, to Vermont's future economic growth and vitality. Programs that are successful in increasing postsecondary aspirations start early, in middle school or before, and combine goal setting, career awareness, academic relevance, education planning and development of the ability to link education, training and career opportunities—giving students and their families the tools to successfully navigate life beyond high school. The Partnership must develop strategies to expand access to aspiration-building opportunities, including the Transformation Policy Commission's recommendation that every Vermont student should have a personal learning plan that builds on the student's individual skill levels, interests, and learning styles, and includes specific goals and strategies for high school transition and postsecondary learning, including how to prepare for success and how to pay for college.

(See attached document "Vermont Career Planning System.")

3. DEVELOP "EARLY PROMISE" MODELS

Many states and local communities offer early commitment or early "promise" models that guarantee college admission and financial support for low-income students if those students in turn commit to and complete a series of requirements dependent on each higher education institution's admissions requirements, typically including success in a college-bound secondary curriculum and "good citizenship."

Pathways to College, an alliance of national organizations committed to advancing college access and success for underserved populations, identifies three basic characteristics of effective "early commitment" programs: (1) the programs make a guarantee of financial aid; (2) they designate aid only for economically disadvantaged students; and (3) they identify and enroll students in elementary, middle, or early high school for the early commitment program, well before the student graduates from high school. Effective state models include Indiana, Oklahoma, California, Washington and Wisconsin. Strong community-based models include Kalamazoo and El Dorado. Recognizing that many of these programs are funded by private foundations or donations, the Partnership should examine these models with the aim of implementing a state-level and/ or local programs in Vermont.

4. TRANSFORM HIGH SCHOOL

In Vermont:

- 85 percent of ninth graders complete high school (2006, Vermont Department of Education).

- 70 percent of high school graduates aspire to continue their education beyond high school within one year of graduation (2007, VSAC).
- 44 percent of all nineteen-year-olds are enrolled in college (2006, Postsecondary Opportunity).
- 42 percent of Vermonters over the age of 25 have an associate's, bachelor's or graduate degree (2007, U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey).

The Partnership should focus on the key "leak" in the pipeline: high school graduation to college continuation. That means rethinking what happens in high school in order to greatly enhance student engagement, ensuring that learning opportunities are relevant, rigorous and personalized, and that all students are aspiring to and preparing to be successful in postsecondary learning. For many students, that will require more experiential learning, including better integration between high school and tech center learning opportunities. That, in turn, will require new ways of documenting experiential learning during high school for postsecondary admissions processes. Again, the work of the State Board of Education's Transformation Policy Commission provides a strong foundation for thinking about high school transformation.

5. INSTITUTE A STATEWIDE DUAL ENROLLMENT POLICY

The Partnership should work to implement a comprehensive, statewide dual enrollment policy, designed to serve a wide range of students, including those from groups who attend college at disproportionately low rates as well as higher achieving students who are ready for college-level curriculum prior to graduation from high school. Strong state models include Texas, Florida, Rhode Island and Utah.

In addition to recommendations found elsewhere in this document, specific policy recommendations include:

1. Establish a dedicated, sustainable and sufficient state funding mechanism for high school students to enroll in college courses while still in high school, using VAST as the funding model. The estimated *annual* State contribution for a comprehensive, statewide dual enrollment program is \$500,000.
2. Expand access to VAST beyond VTC and beyond science/ technology to targeted programs at other postsecondary institutions to provide early college options and additional full-year alternatives to the senior year for higher achieving students statewide, allowing students the opportunity to work toward a high school diploma and associate's degree simultaneously.
3. Require high schools to accept college credit acquired through dual enrollment at regionally accredited postsecondary institutions to meet high school graduation requirements.
4. Establish as a state-level goal and school quality standard that Vermont high school students will complete at least one college course, or other postsecondary education/ training experience of some kind, prior to high school graduation.
5. Expand web-based and other distance learning dual enrollment offerings to expand access.

(See attached document "Why Invest in Dual Enrollment?")

6. CREATE STATE-LEVEL COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENT

The Partnership should support the development of state-level standards and a state-level assessment for college and career readiness, aligned with existing state-level K-12 assessments and other assessments

under development such as those for career/ technical programs. The message to all students should be: if you graduate from high school in Vermont, you will be ready for college-level course work and have acquired the 21st century skills necessary for entry-level success in the workplace. The state-level college and career readiness assessment ideally would take place during the first semester of the junior year in order to allow students to build deficient skills as needed during the senior year.

7. ADOPT SPECIFIC STRATEGIES FOR ADULTS

Vermont has a relatively high percentage of adults who have accumulated some number of college credits but have not earned a degree. Especially given demographic trends in Vermont, increasing educational attainment overall will require creating incentives for adults to begin or continue their postsecondary education. To be successful in today's job market, individuals often must update their skills or attain additional education to increase overall employability and job satisfaction. In addition to ensuring the Vermonters have access to career education and guidance, the Partnership should review and work to expand existing programs that are designed specifically for adults, such as the External Degree Program at Johnson State College. The Partnership should also review and work to expand existing programs that provide a mechanism for demonstrating college-level learning acquired through experience, such as the Vermont State Colleges' Assessment of Prior Learning program. Finally, the Partnership should review strategies for expanding the use of technology in meeting needs of working adults with family or other obligations, and develop specific strategies for meeting the needs of disengaged adults.

8. MEASURE OUTCOMES THROUGH A PK-16 LONGITUDINAL ASSESSMENT

Because of the assurances built into the ARRA funding, Vermont has agreed to develop a PK-16 longitudinal data system. Even if the State does not receive additional funding for this project, the State must ensure its implementation, which should include a PK-16 research agenda based on performance gaps evident between groups of students and across schools.

A STATEMENT ABOUT FUNDING

Other than a specific recommendation for funding dual enrollment, the above strategies cannot be accomplished without adjustments in current funding. The ARRA funds include opportunities for grant funding to initiate the longitudinal study, for which as indicated above, the State has submitted a grant proposal. The Vermont State Board of Education has made many of these recommendations as well, and will be working to implement the transformation of Vermont schools based on a five-year timeline and adequate transition funding as recommended in the final report of the Education Transformation Policy Commission. These goals will require an investment of state funds, additional grant funding and a redirection of current revenue streams over the long term.

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